

Attn: Fire Suppression Committee

Re: Fire Suppression in Montana

From: Jim Knapp, Corvallis Rural Fire District Chief

I would like to comment on the issue of wild land fire in Montana. Committee members must realize that the most critical element of wild land fire suppression is to extinguish wild land fire and prevent "Project Fires" from starting. To achieve this one must utilize all recourses possible while maintaining fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers of the state.

Let's discuss the agencies and contractors that are all players in the suppression of wild land fire.

**US Forest Service-** the USFS is a very large agency and has a lot to offer. I will not pretend to be an expert in regard to the USFS, but I can tell you that during initial attack they are excellent at supplying air support and recourses on the ground. They have some difficulty in the early season as they employ seasonal firefighters. The negative side of the USFS is their inability to use common sense and get suppression efforts underway quickly. I sent an engine to the Derby Fire in eastern Montana in 2006, upon our arrival our crew was asked for their inspection form. Our crew supplied them with the DOT inspection form, the weight tickets, and an inspection form that had been done by the State of Montana. Our crew was told that they would not be allowed to go to work until a USFS inspector looked at the truck. The USFS didn't have an inspector there yet and it took approximately seven hours to get one. The truck was inspected and then went to work. The sad part of this is that we were not required to get inspected, and the engine we sent them is as nice as they get. It is very common in the USFS for the right hand to have no idea what the left hand is doing.

**State of Montana-** The DNRC is a complicated animal. Our fire district is located in Ravalli County and the DNRC has traded protection in our county to the USFS. This means that the DNRC has no direct protection in Ravalli County with the exception of a small portion on the north end of the county. The DNRC will supply air support and ground support if requested in Ravalli County which is a great benefit in the fire suppression effort. This is provided in the County Co-op agreement between the DNRC and the County Commissioners. The state also provides some surplus equipment and training to local government fire agencies.

**Local Government Fire Agencies-** This is the one area where you will want to pay close attention. The local government fire agencies are the only agency that is ready year round. We are the best value that the State has as we are located in nearly every town in the State. The number of DNRC engines in Ravalli County I believe is three. These are staffed and operated by local government personnel. The number of Fire Department engines in Ravalli County is nearly one hundred; we respond to and suppress countless fires annually at no expense to the state. The fire departments throughout the State are very well versed at initial attack as that is what we do on a daily basis. We attack fires aggressively and try to get our people back to work or back to their families.

**Private Contractors-** Private contractors in fire suppression have grown greatly in the past five years. There are some excellent private contractors in the business of fire suppression. Typically they are called in on project fires and provide engines, water tenders, catering, showers, potable water, forklifts, and low boys to haul equipment and nearly anything you can think of. Training standards have been implemented and meeting that standard is not easy for the private contractor. With the ever increasing fire seasons the private contractor is playing a large role. The downside to the evolution of outsourcing to the private sector is that the livelihood of this industry requires us to have a fire season. The success of these businesses is in the hands of Mother Nature, or is it. Is there any correlation between the increase in private contractors and the increase in human caused fires? This would be a great discussion between the committee and your fire management staff. Is outsourcing really saving the state money? What is the motivation for a private contractor to extinguish a fire? I would think very carefully about getting the

private contractor involved in the initial attack aspect. You must realize that once a fire is extinguished they go off the payroll. To give you an example I received a phone call from a private contractor one day and he asked me if I had fire trucks working on the I-90 complex. I told him that we had two trucks on that fire and he asked me to bring them home because there are private contractors starving to death, and the fire department doesn't need the money. We have a huge challenge in front of us in figuring out how to deal with the profitability of wild land fire suppression.

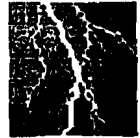
**The Volunteer Fire Agencies-** This relates to fire departments but specifically volunteer agencies. The economics of firefighting seems to be the number one priority of the state and federal agencies. Wouldn't it be great if we could make this animal reverse itself? The State can no longer ride on the backs of the Volunteer Firefighter. Last year's fire season was the last straw for me and for the Corvallis Rural Fire District. We spent several days on the Tin Cup Fire, The Black Cat Fire and one 18 hour shift on the Sealy Lake Fire. We have always been an active participant in wild land fire suppression and we had many documented saves in the 2007 wild land season. I would like the committee to know that on these project fires the volunteer fire personnel were never paid. What is happening is the state and feds are calling our responses "mutual aid" and therefore we don't get paid. The mutual aid period varies slightly in different agreements but in no case should a volunteer be expected to work day after day for nothing. Please note that not only did they not get paid but when they leave work they are losing money. This seems to be working out well for the State but this will not happen again in our department as I will be pulling my crews off the line if this doesn't get fixed. I will honor mutual aid for a period of four hours at which time I will expect our staff to get paid. One other issue that has gone on for too long is paying the volunteer firefighter the same rate as the seasonal staff. Our Firefighters have years of experience and are worth more to the state than that. A firefighter from the city of Missoula makes approximately six dollars more per hour than one of our volunteers while performing the exact same job, and note that a city firefighter typically doesn't have as much wild land fire experience as a rural fire fighter. The volunteer firefighter doesn't expect special treatment; we just expect to be treated as an equal. I realize that financial responsibility is a key element in fire suppression but at the same time the State cannot afford to lose the volunteer fire service as a partner. We are the best value you have.

**Summary-** There are many agencies involved in wild land fire suppression and they all play a roll. While I believe that outsourcing is unavoidable, I also believe that the State must be careful in how far they let this go. The private industry in today's world most likely cannot be avoided, but how do we deal with the big business of firefighting. Keep in mind that the agencies were here before the private contractors, and if we were to have a few wet years, we will be here after they are gone. The one thing the State has to fix, that is truly broken is the way the volunteer fire service is treated. An effort has to be made to make people want to be volunteers for their communities and in turn a valuable firefighter for the State and Federal Government.

Sincerely,

Jim Knapp (Corvallis Rural Fire District Chief)

From: Doug Soehren <dsoehren@rkymtn.net>  
Subject: **Fire Suppression Committee comments**  
Date: February 1, 2008 4:58:56 PM MST  
To: lheisel@mt.gov.  
1 Attachment, 31.5 KB



Fire Suppression Committee  
c/o Leanne Heisel  
Legislative Services Division  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620

Thank you for the invitation to comment. Please enter this letter into the record.

The legislation that created the FSC requires that the committee investigate "firefighting operations in Montana, including operations on tribal land and private land, by the state and federal governments and the management policies affecting the success of those operations".

As you know, "the success of those operations" have been minimal at best the last few years. Fire fighters have saved numerous homes and infrastructure but the cost has been very high, perhaps higher, I will argue, than the value of all the property saved. But even if it turns out to be somewhat less you should be asking the fundamental question about responsibility.

Who should be responsible and accountable for fire protection for people who choose to reside and/or build their cabins, summer homes, outbuildings, residences or businesses within or adjacent to fire prone areas? The taxpayers? Prudent, sensible taxpayers should not be forced to pay for the foolishness or personal preferences of others. I have numerous friends who have chosen to live and build in fire prone areas knowing full well and accepting completely the risks thereof. Without exception these friends protect themselves and therefore do not want or need help from the taxpayers.

I am a Bitterroot native involved in public land natural resource issues for many years. I have witnessed and survived many fires. I lament the harmful effects and all the losses that fire cause. However, it is becoming increasingly clear to many of us in the Bitterroot and throughout the west that we are dealing with forces of Nature above and beyond the power of us humans. It is appropriate for you to stand back and reevaluate the fundamental idea of fire suppression as I hope you are doing now.

After decades of good faith efforts to reduce fire caused resource damage the Forest Service has learned that their fire suppression efforts, while effective in some areas over the short term, often exacerbated the problem over the long term. Human caused fire suppression has resulted in increased concentrations of fuels in many areas. Hundreds of millions of dollars and 30 years later the Forest Service has learned a lot. Here's an excerpt from a report written last year by Richard Manning, a Missoula writer:

*"The idea became popularly and bluntly known as the let-it-burn policy. It has been the subject of fierce debate both within and outside the Forest Service and other land management agencies for more than 30 years. Yet in light of today's conditions, the policy has been validated.*

*"It's the most successful resource program the northern region has," says George Weldon, deputy director for fire, aviation, and air in the Forest Service's Northern Region, the agency's top fire guy in Montana and northern Idaho. He makes his case with a map showing the last 10 years' worth of fire in and around the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, which straddles the Idaho-Montana state line. (This was the scene of the Forest Service's first experimental wildland fire, in 1972, then an act of heresy; Daniels was the supervisor who let it burn.)" Please read this very well written and informative report on the web at: <http://www.onearth.org/article/our-trial-by-fire>. And please talk to George Weldon if you haven't already.*

Human intervention on a limited basis is certainly appropriate but to date we have not demonstrated much humility nor the lessons learned by observing the way Nature manages Wilderness.

Logging is not the way to address catastrophic fire for these simple reasons:

1) Increased fires and increased risks of fires are caused by global warming (human caused) on such a grand scale that resource

managers and the timber industry combined cannot possibly get ahead of it. There isn't time.

2) It is not profitable due to the collapse of the housing market.

3) Federal law (NEPA and others) will not allow large scale operations without carefully considering the consequences.

Even if the aforementioned weren't true I would rather live with the risk of fire and smoke than live in this area after the forest and all it's resources and amenities have been removed. Fire has been with us for a very long time in this valley and I now know that is the way it must be.

We have learned a lot about fires that supports less fighting and less spending. I'm sure others are reporting on these specific lessons and details. I would like to point to George Wuerthner's testimony before you last month (see attachment).

Testimony of George Wu (31.5 KB)

It is time, and time is of the essence, to develop some reasonable and effective solutions. I hope you will recommend the following:

The Montana State Legislature should:

A) Establish Rural Fire Districts in all fire prone areas. The Districts must be granted the authority and responsibility to require residents or other property owners within the district to:

- (1) adhere to county building codes and maintenance requirements that are designed to reduce the risk from forest and grass fires and the burning embers that may precede them and
- (2) through fire assessments on their property, to pay the full cost of fire prevention, pre-suppression (engines, fire crews, etc.) and fire suppression, or, sign a waiver accepting all the consequences of any fires. The waiver form should suggest but not demand that residents and landowners should consider fire insurance.

B) Enact tax incentive legislation to reward responsible citizens who already live in fire hazard zones if they take proactive steps to fireproof their buildings.

C) If it hasn't already been done by the Montana Legislature, the Montana counties should be granted full authority and responsibility to:

- Regulate how growth within the county occurs, warning land owners of their fire related responsibilities.
- Require county wide comprehensive land use planning and zoning. Fire hazard zones could then be designated as such and buildings, if any building is allowed, should be non flammable.
- Regulate road location, design and construction standards for subdivisions and/or residences that insure safe ingress and egress for engines, water tenders, large trucks, and fire crew transport equipment.
- Establish county wide fire education and preparation guidelines funded by State fire funds.

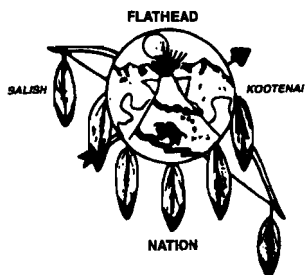
The FSC asks what we think will happen in Montana with regard to fire protection (fire prevention, pre-suppression and suppression) in the next 10 years if there is no change in policy, practice or funding?

As suggested above, we will have increased incidents of fires along with all fire related losses regardless of what is done. The public (excepting those who profit handsomely fighting fires or providing services for firefighters) will become more and more irate at representatives that throw our hard earned tax dollars on natural fires. Representatives will be sought who understand the causes of fire and who is responsible for dealing with them.

Loss of firefighter lives, losses due to mistakes in judgment and the tremendous expense born by taxpayers compel many of us to ask, is it really worth it? I think not.

Sincerely,

Doug Soehren  
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Hamilton, MT 59840  
406-363-6391



**THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES  
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A Confederation of the Salish,  
Upper Pend d'Oreilles  
and Kootenai Tribes

**February 14, 2008**

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Fire Suppression Committee  
c/o Leanne Heisel  
Legislative Services Division  
P.O. Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Fire Suppression Committee;

Please accept this letter as a response to your request for assistance and advice in regards to Montana fire suppression issues that are being investigated by the Montana Legislature's Fire Suppression Committee (FSC).

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Nation also have great concerns with ongoing fire suppression operational activities and Federal, State, and Tribal fire management policies. Tribal perspectives are very important to any recommendations and findings the committee will produce from the investigations and community meetings. The Tribes support any activities that foster dialogs in providing for greater firefighter safety, fire suppression cost efficiencies, and firefighter utilization through improved fire suppression policies. Please consider keeping CSKT fully involved in this ongoing process.

I would like to express a number of observations and recommendations on Montana fire suppression operations and policy. These specific recommendations have a basis in our long history of cooperative fire management activities with Federal and State wildland fire agencies and from lessons learned during the 2007 fire season.

The Tribes believe that initial and extended attack operations are still very efficient and safe as demonstrated by historical fire statistics and specific fire suppression actions associated with the 2007 fire season. Large fire organizations are also very safe, but are less efficient in suppression operations due to the sheer number and size of wildland fires due to the existing climate of extended droughts, historically low summer fuel moistures, and record-breaking weather conditions.

Maintaining initial and extended attack successes are dependent on high levels of interagency cooperation and our abilities to supplement critically short fire suppression resources with fire severity funding.

Cooperative fire suppression has always been the principle strong point in successful Montana and Northern Rockies fire response activities. Local governments and agencies take continuing pride in how we organize for fire suppression, train, and manage large fire with full participation from all interagency partners. We need to maintain our high levels of cooperation into the future. We need to improve in a sharing of ground and aviation resources on a local, zone, and regional basis to address expected shortages of resources during an escalating period of hotter summers and increased fire occurrence. Our successes will still be defined by cooperative planning, communications, and training. We need to maintain collaborative approaches to ongoing and emerging fire suppression issues.

The cost of fire suppression (at all levels) is a principle issue of concern to all wildland fire agencies. One aspect of this issue is that federal agencies are reducing or capping annual fire severity funding that will compromise initial and extended attack successes. We would recommend that all wildland fire suppression agencies (Federal, State, Tribal) ensure and protect supplemental fire severity funding processes for the hiring of emergency manpower, equipment, and aircraft. The State looks to Tribes for hand-crews and heavy equipment resources, the Tribes look to the State for aircraft support. A pre-planned sharing of critical fire suppression resources is very important to interagency initial response, mutual aid successes.

Interagency fire suppression organizations can no longer expect to achieve full perimeter control on all large fires. Standard full perimeter control strategies are very costly and the many fireline hazards and risks are difficult to mitigate in providing a safe work environment for our firefighters. Evolving wildland fire policy is dictating a need for wildland agency understanding, decision making, and implementation of appropriate management responses under alternative large fire suppression strategies. A lesson learned in our multi-jurisdictional partnerships in managing the 2007 Chippy Creek, Blackcat, and Jocko Lakes Fires is that the United States Forest Services, CSKT, and the State of Montana are not on the same page in regards to Appropriate Management Response (AMR), Long-term fall back protection strategies, and other alternative large fire suppression decision making and implementation that is impacting the public and communities.

Alternative strategies require less fire suppression resource commitments and effort at lower costs and the public needs a better understanding of these fire policy concepts. These issues lead us to recommendations that more interagency dialog, collaborative policy making, and increased agency administrator and public education are needed in defining agency fire suppression missions and in structuring future long-duration fire suppression strategies.

Private contractor (Best Value and EERA) firefighting resources are important to our fire suppression successes in Montana. We believe that all wildland fire suppression agencies try to use these resources on a fair and equitable basis. Dispatching and resource hiring and assignment difficulties arise during very chaotic times during multiple large fire situations. Successful assignment and use of private contractors depends on effective pre-planning and implementation by dispatch and incident support organizations.

Use of private firefighting equipment continues to be a very complex situation. The Tribes believe there are many things that can be done to improve contractor use and services. The local contractors can help improve the situation by meeting pre-season paperwork and equipment inspection deadlines and by improving their track record on annual firefighter training and incident qualification and certification processes.

The Tribes would recommend continued interagency support of local and zone equipment boards and committee activities, the fire suppression equipment best value system, and other fire business and equipment procurement activities. All dispatch organizations need to adhere to strict resource list rotations, contractor services information support, and equipment inspection timelines to fulfill local extended attack and large fire resource ordering and assignment processes.

The Tribes believe that over the next ten years, Montana wildland fire agencies will experience decreased fire suppression capabilities and effectiveness, with greater safety risks to firefighters if no changes in policy, practices, or funding are made. State and Tribal agencies are trust asset protection organizations. Both agencies must evaluate our agency missions as full suppression organizations. Can we afford to suppress all wildland fires (at high costs) in the face of changing climates, increased long-duration (mega) fire events and with increasing hazard exposure to our firefighters?

Montana will experience increased impacts to Tribal trust, private, and community lands and properties over the next ten-year period. The Tribes believe that governments should support preparedness, hazard fuel reduction, fire severity, and fire prevention information/education budgets to keep pace with expected increases in initial/extended attack and long-duration fire workloads.

All wildland fire management organizations have already started important preparations for next fire season. These preparations include issues associated with the activities being investigated by the Legislature's Fire Suppression Committee. Regional, zone, and local agencies and coordinating groups are making significant progress on 2007 fire suppression issues (ie, training; interpretations of appropriate management response policy; Incident Management Team support; and, multi-jurisdictional delegations of authority, Wildland Fire Situation Analysis', and cost share agreement processes).

The Tribes will commit to progressive cooperative activities and the sharing of resources and expertise to address all levels of preparedness, information/education, and operational fire response actions with our interagency partners.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Legislative Fire Suppression Committee. Please contact a fire representative, at the CSKT Division of Fire (406-676-2550), if you have any questions, or need additional information on the many CSKT observations and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James H. Steele, Jr.", written in dark ink.

James H. Steele, Jr., Chair  
Tribal Council

Cc: James Durglo, Forestry Dept. Head  
Bob McCrea, Acting FMO  
Tony Harwood, Forestry Dept.

Bcc: Fire Chrono. File



## **Fire Facts July: 2007**

## **Pertaining to the Rocky Mountain Front Fires**

**Fire Use** is a term describing **managing a fire for resource values**. This technique is often elected in Wilderness settings by Forest Service decision-makers. A related term is **prescribed fire**, which is fires intentionally set, and let burn to reduce hazardous fuels in a controlled setting. **Fire Use can be loosely termed "let burn."**

**Fire Suppression means to put the fire out.** Forest Service decision makers suppress most fires outside the wilderness boundaries. Wilderness fires may or may not be suppressed, depending on the many conditions.

The Bob Marshall Complex has a fire plan that outlines conditions that allow **"let burn" or Fire Use**. There are certain conditions that must be met before fire managers can allow a let burn fire in wilderness, such as burning out of the wilderness, or public endangerment. Also the decision maker may require limits of the tools used for suppression, such as dozer line, clipper line, fire line explosives or chain saw and pumps in the wilderness. The Forest Service changes the name of "wilderness let burn" fires every few years, and that confuses people as to what they are talking about.

Wild land Fire Use creates goals for the Forest Managers in acres treated within wilderness. The Lewis and Clark Forest in 2007 had a goal of about 9000 acres to burn in wilderness.

**This is a critical performance element on Forest Service Managers annual report card.** It is beneficial for the managers to let wilderness fire burn.

### **History:**

**\*Fool Creek Wild land Fire Use was declared on July 5, 2007 and managed to let burn and be directed until Aug 2<sup>nd</sup> when it was declared a suppression fire upon reaching outside the wilderness boundary.**

**\*Ahorn Fire** was declared a **suppression fire** on July 11, and continued to burn also as it was **lost in the initial days because it was grossly under-manned with only 33 firefighters** in difficult terrain and heavy fuels.

**\*Refueling of helicopters was allowed only at the Choteau Airport.** This required about **1 1/2 hour turn time** from the fire area near the Benchmark Airstrip to the Choteau Airport for fuel. **The helicopter's can fly about 2 to 2 1/2 hour on a tank of fuel.** This made about *one hour of aggressive* fire fighting for each helicopter before having to return to Choteau (50 mile away) for fuel. Many helicopter pilots expressed frustration with fire managers for not working to put the Ahorn fire out. The pilots stated they simply dropped water on hot spot that were in the middle of the fire instead of where the fire was heading. Most of these pilots had years of firefighting experience. There have been question's raised as to whether these fires were detected by the Forest Service earlier than the dates given in the reports.

Because the Rocky Mountain Ranger District now uses cell phones for some of its communication between lookouts and the district office so there is no records of conversations.

**Critical Questions:** (to ask the Forest Service)

**Why was a fire let go so early in the season?** No attempts were made to suppress Fool Cr. Fire, stating unsafe condition for both fire fighters and aircraft. **What is so unsafe for aircraft?** Did aviation people make that call of was it from Ranger Munoz, from Choteau.

**Why was the Fool Creek fire so dangerous to fight** when fires have been fought, in like conditions for years? Heavy Canopy is stated, as the reason that retardant was not used and not effective. **Why not at least try when the fire is so early on the year??????????**

**What are the resource benefits of burning hot and burning 80% of the Bob Marshall east of the divide within the short time span of the last 20 years?**

**What was the cost savings by letting Fool Creek Burn? Rather than invest the resources into early suppression.**

**Why wasn't more effort put into suppressing the Ahorn Fire? 77 people were assigned to the Ahorn fire. 33 were on the ground firefighters, and the remaining 44 people were support and structure protection.**

**The Forest Service keeps saying fire is a natural in wilderness!** If fire is **natural** why is all the effort put into directing the fire in what they call desirable directions. Why are all the man made structures "cabins and bridges" protected instead of just putting the fire out?

**Double standard on motorized use in wilderness on fires.** Helicopters are used to steer the fire in certain directions, deliver supplies and people around and on the fire. Water pumps are run for sprinklers to protect bridges and cabins, and chainsaws used to control the fire where managers want to control it. After the fire is out and for years to come trail crews open trails with handsaws. In spite of what the Forest Service says they are not keeping up with the deadfall blocking our trails. Burned over trails are not passable due to deadfall, and the forest service still uses handsaws and doesn't keep the trails open. Horse hay was flow into wilderness cabins by helicopter after the fires were over in late September with the last helicopter assigned to the fire. Why didn't they pack the hay in???

**Comments** by the public, permittees, and outfitters need to be made to public officials on the effects the "let burn" fire use and the lack of suppression has on our public lands. **The US Forest Service has no intention to changing their philosophy on fire management.**

Are the Forest Service Managers promoting large-scale fires to **increase their personal income?**

Why are cell phones used so much now? Is that a way to avoid permanent records of conversations between lookouts and head offices that may include fire detection?

**Effects are:**

- The Montana State Fish, Wildlife and Parks, has our hunting season open, but **virtually all the Rocky Mountain front and Bob Marshall Wilderness** lands were restricted by the Forest Service due to the fires. This infringes on our use of our public lands.
- **The lack of summer and hunting season is decimating to our Montana Outfitters and Guides** and to our resort complexes on the front. Clientele are lost for this season and the revenue for these businesses is lost. These people do not get a paycheck unlike government decision makers. Outfitters are reporting cancellations for 2008 because, customers don't want to see burned up forest.
- **The Dept of Natural Resources and Conservation as well as local and volunteer fire departments** have spend weeks and thousands to millions of dollars protecting private property as well as state resources due to the Ahorn and Fool Creek Fires which started on public lands, but threatened private lands. The DNRC has a policy of "putting fires out." The governor **convened a special session to pay the state fire bills**, many of which started on federal land.
- **The taxpayer dollars spent on the fires is mind-boggling.** Suppressing the fire initially is much cheaper that trying to hear it around.
- **Private homes or recreation residences have been evacuated** for over a month at Benchmark and Beaver-Willow road, Mortimer Gulch, and Scoutana, as well as the Massey tract in the Teton which was burnt over. Also residences on the Forest boundary have been on evacuation notice and had to pack all their goods and have their lives disrupted.
- **The more timber canopy that burns in the Sun River Drainage the earlier the peak snowmelt comes off.** Gibson Dam can't store irrigation flows that come off all at once.
- Those of us who love the Rocky Mountain Front have lost the beauty, as we know it for our lifetime. We are not able to hunt or recreate freely this year on the front, and will be camping in snags for many years.

Many of us have different stories; the bottom line is **much of our beautiful backcountry is gone due to the Forest Service decisions.** The use of Fire Use and lack of suppression need's to be severely examined. We are tired of the never-ending burn of our back yard. The Forest Service is no longer fulfilling its mission, which is: **Caring for the land and Serving the people.**

### **Needed Changes**

1. All fires occurring during the hot summer months “June-July-Aug.” must be suppress aggressively even in wilderness areas. Natural or prescribed fires can be managed as “let burn” during the cooler months of the year.
2. **Forest Service District Rangers** have too much say in the burning of our wilderness. A team or panel of knowledgeable and affected people need to be involved in the decisions made on any wilderness let burn fires, whether for recourse benefit or safety. Examples are (outfitters, state fire experts, private land owners, county officials, soil scientist, hydrologists, exc.)
3. Some of the Forest Service fire management team is in a position for **personal financial gain by allowing a fire to burn or escape.** **Oversight needed.**
4. Many informed and affected people feel they cannot speak **against** the **Forest Service** on fire issues because of fears of reprisal from local Forest Service Managers.
5. Forest Service decision makers need to held accountable for losses due to mismanaged fires.
6. The public should have a right to be speak and be heard by the Forest Service on burning policies. The Forest Service has side stepped and ignored this requirement.
7. Eighty percent of the Bob Marshall Wilderness east of the continental divide has burn since 1988. *Why does it all have to burn????*
8. The Forest Service has been putting fires out for almost 100 years. **How can it be natural to let fires in wilderness burn now?**

To: Fire Suppression Committee

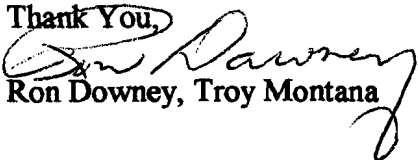
1# The number one fire tactic that has gone by the wayside on a number of fronts is initial attack. The speed that it takes to initial attack a going fire is of the utmost importance to the end result of that fire, the number of people that will be needed to contain the fire relates into smaller costs for the fire. With the droughts that we have suffered in the last couple of years, the fuels have been very explosive and I believe that the initial attack has to be improved on for control of these fires.

2# From the outside looking in, ( I have not had anything to do with fire since the 80's), but with the population that is moving our way in Montana, I would think that the let burn policy should go by the wayside. If not we simply can not properly protect the masses from Fire, the fuels are to great and the flame heights to extreme.

3# Due to the lack of management of our forests I believe that since the logging of late has been extensively on the private land, most of the fire problems will be on Federal land. Nothing can be done to alleviate fire problems by next spring or summer. The problem is to extensive to solve short term. When the County and the loggers tried to meet with the environmentalist over the problem of protecting our people and the town, they told us they would agree to only ¼ mile from town on the windward side. That is absolutely no protection at all against catastrophic fire. We are getting very close to losing possibly a lot of human life and structures.

4# Just closing our forests due to the Endangered Species act, has put the country on a collision course with disaster. Before the Forest was closed down, we had access to all portions and the logging kept equipment on the ground during all peak fire periods. Also as we know, it kept the fuel loadings down and made the fires easier to control. Something that has bothered me throughout this steady decline of management, is the lack of responsibility by the environmental community. They should be held accountable for their actions regarding the closure of the forests and the fire problems that are evident today.

Thank You,

  
Ron Downey, Troy Montana